



Jericho Bremner (left) and Waylon Roulette accept the 2007 Manitoba Human Rights Commitment Award on behalf of the students and teachers of the Bridges FASD program at David Livingstone School.

Imagine being portrayed as "criminal like" or "lacking a conscience," or being called a "psychopath." This is how children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder have seen themselves portrayed. Society has placed a huge stigma on both individuals with FASD and the families who love them. By speaking about their disability with grace, perseverance and courage, the students and teachers of the Bridges FASD Program at David Livingstone Community School demonstrated that they were deserving of the Manitoba Human Rights 2007 Commitment Award. This year the award recognized activities that are advancing human rights by overcoming discrimination based on mental disability. This is the first time that children have been the recipients of the Commitment Award.

The students and teachers of the Bridges program host dozens of guests from around the country, and as far away as Australia, each year in their classroom. The students speak articulately about how their disability was caused, and openly about their limitations. They also reveal the many gifts and talents that they possess.

Those who have learned about FASD from them have said that their own personal beliefs have been changed.

2007 Manitoba Human Rights Award Recipients



Krupa Kotecha, a student at Balmoral Hall School, accepts the Sybil Shack Memorial Youth Award for promoting human rights and taking a stand against racism.

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The Rights Connection

by Jerry Woods - Chairperson

Developing a mutually respectful relationship

"I just don't feel safe in Winnipeg, especially in this area." I heard that message repeated throughout the recent community consultations on police services in racialized communities. Those who live in some of the most diverse and poorest areas of the city also want a better relationship with police officers. And yes, there was criticism and accusations against the police.

In June of 2005, representatives of a neighbourhood safety committee brought concerns about police services and Aboriginal residents to the Commission's attention. They did not want to file a human rights complaint at that time, but asked the Commission to look into their concerns.

The Commission partnered with researchers from the University of Winnipeg and established the Racialized Communities and Police Services Project to examine the concerns raised by the neighbourhood safety committee. The RCAPS Project began with community consultations to determine the scope of any problem and obtain information about the concerns citizens have.

From October 2006 until August 2007, the Commission and University representatives met with residents in the West Broadway, the Centennial, and the Lord Selkirk Park neighbourhoods.

The major themes that emerged included the importance of anti-racism education, the need for more resources for cross-cultural training, a more effective public complaints mechanism than the Law Enforcement Review Agency, fear of the police, the lack of police services to the Aboriginal community, the abusive treatment by police based on Aboriginal ancestry, the need for community-based policing, the systemic nature of racial bias in the Winnipeg police service, and sexually abusive treatment of Aboriginal women by police.

It is important to note that the project was not intended to attack the Police Service and the underlying message was that most people want to feel safe in their communities. They want to develop a mutually respectful relationship with the police. Both the Commission and the University of Winnipeg hope to work together with the Winnipeg Police Service and its new Chief on the next phase of the RCAPS Project, which includes developing strategies that support bias-free policing services.

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And that's not all. The students in the Bridges Program have raised \$4000 over the past four years for the Christmas Cheer Board. They have spearheaded the "Pennies From Heaven" campaign at their school. They have had a plant sale, raising money for a children's orphanage in South Africa.



Actress and Occupational Therapist at the Manitoba Schizophrenia Society, Jane Burpee performs a monologue about "Trudie," a woman on the street affected by the stresses of mental health at the International Human Rights Day Awards lunch.

This year they have registered their school in "Project Love" raising funds to buy school supplies for children in Zambia. Last, but certainly not least, they have completed a two-year project writing and illustrating a book and DVD titled "Jilly's Story: Living with FASD." This book is now being published.

Schools across the country are taking notice of this program and these amazing students. For example, after being impressed with the success of the students in the Bridges Program, teachers and administrators from Hobbema, Alberta have now adopted a similar one.

Krupa Kotecha is the recipient of the 2007 Sybil Shack Memorial Human Rights Youth Award. She is an astounding young woman who has dedicated many hours and copious amounts of energy over the years to promote anti-racism in her school and community.

Krupa understands the disastrous consequences of racism through her mother, a former Ugandan who lived through the dictatorship of Idi Amin. At that time, all Asians were expelled from Uganda, forced to become refugees in foreign countries.

Krupa would not experience the racism her mother did. Yet she was determined to speak out about racism. It began with a short video about race related bullying. Krupa and two of her friends produced and acted in this video, which won the national "Racism - Stop It" competition. The video has been shown both locally and nationally and can be viewed on the Canadian Heritage website.

Krupa continues to pursue promoting anti-racism in her community. She wrote and performed a play about the prejudice faced by a teenage Indian immigrant to Canada. She then organized a school-wide anti-racism/anti-bullying assembly where she performed her play, and later wrote a poignant and convincing essay about barriers to equality faced by minority groups.

The recipients received their awards at a luncheon on December 10, International Human Rights Day.

The three partners who host this event every year, The Manitoba Human Rights Commission, the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the Manitoba Association of Rights and Liberties, also congratulate all of the nominees for their truly remarkable human rights work.

Two Seasonal Wishes

by Elliot Leven - Commissioner

Every year come December, it's the same thing. Polite strangers ask me if I've finished my Christmas shopping yet. My answer usually depends on my energy level.

If I'm feeling energetic and have lots of time, I explain that I am Jewish and that Jews don't celebrate Christmas.

When I'm feeling sluggish or tired, I simply reply that, yes, I've finished my Christmas shopping.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not offended by polite questions about Christmas. Nor do I mind seeing Christmas trees in public places. Nor do I care whether they are called "Christmas trees" or "holiday trees." Hearing Christmas carols in stores and on the radio for eight weeks (starting immediately after Halloween) is a bit annoying, but I can live with that too.

Having said that, I realize that some members of other religions are more concerned about these issues than I am. I also know that some Christians have concerns about the commercialization of Christmas.

I have two seasonal wishes. I wish people would stop to think that not everyone celebrates Christmas. I also wish people would take some time to educate themselves about minority religions.

Come to think of it, I would like to learn more about world religions this year. I think my New Year's resolution in 2008 will to spend some time educating myself about other holidays and religions. I know that libraries and book sellers can help me out. There is also a wealth of information on the Internet. Whether you celebrate Christmas, other holidays, or no holidays at all, I wish you peace and happiness during this season of the year.

Bus drivers to announce all stops

Effective January 1, 2008, Winnipeg Transit, together with the Amalgamated Transit Union, will implement its "Next Stop Policy" on all transit routes.

While the announcement of Next Stops has long been conducted by many bus operators, beginning in the new year, transit passengers can expect to hear announcements of all bus stops on all Transit routes. The announcements will provide additional time for individuals with special needs and/or visual impairments to safely prepare for their exit from the bus.

Manitoba Human Rights Commission Chairperson Jerry Woods commended Winnipeg Transit and the Amalgamated Transit Union for the initiative saying "this will certainly have a significant, positive impact on people with disabilities."

Both Winnipeg Transit and the Amalgamated Transit Union are asking passengers to be patient while all the bus operators become accustomed to announcing the specific streets and not just the transfer points.

Future plans include providing automated bus stop announcements, which is expected to become operational city-wide over the next several years.